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Afghanistan's Struggle for Freedom

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Following is an address by John C. Whitehead, Deputy Secretary of State, before the World Affairs Council, Washington, D.C., December 13, 1985.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss Afghanistan with you today. As many of you know, 6 years ago, on Christmas eve, Soviet airborne troops began landing in Kabul. By December 27, Soviet forces had risen to 5,000; within 6 months they numbered 85,000. Today, there are about 120,000 Soviet troops in Afghanistan, with an additional 30,000 poised across the border in the Soviet Union.

The Soviet invasion and continued occupation of Afghanistan is a blatant example of communist colonialism at its worst. Without provocation, certainly without invitation, the Soviet Union simply invaded a nonaligned, nonmenacing, and independent country. Soviet troops stormed the presidential palace, murdered the insufficiently docile Marxist President Amin, and installed Babrak Karmal as his compliant replacement. For 6 years, using almost every conceivable means available in their vast military arsenal, the Soviets have tried to pacify, conquer, and Sovietize Afghanistan. In this, they have failed and failed miserably.

The Soviet invasion sounded the death knell for detente. It revealed, for the first time since World War II, the Soviet Union's willingness to use its own military force outside Eastern Europe. Coming in the wake of Soviet adventurism through proxies in Angola, Ethiopia, and South Yemen, the naked invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet troops exposed Soviet expansionism to the world.

The Soviet Union has always proclaimed its support for people fighting for their national independence. Afghanistan turns those hollow words into a bad joke. Nowhere is the will for freedom stronger than in Afghanistan, yet nowhere in the world has the carnage wrought by Soviet imperialism been greater.

Soviet Tactics

Using indoctrination, subversion, and stark military terror, the Soviets have tried for 6 years to crush the Afghan will to resist. They have literally tried to destroy everything Afghan—history, culture, tradition, religion, family.

Unable to pacify or control the countryside, for example, the Soviet Union in 1984 resorted to tactics aimed specifically at depopulating areas of strategic importance. High-altitude saturation bombings, the willful destruction of crops and livestock, reprisals against civilians, and the widespread use of antipersonnel mines are just some of the tactics the Soviets are using in their war on the Afghan people.

Bombs disguised as toys or pens—designed to maim, not kill—continue to be used. It is difficult to conceive what military objective might be served by such devices. One French doctor explained it this way:

> The Russians know quite well that in this type of war, an injured person is much more trouble than a dead person. In many cases, he will die several days or weeks later . . . with atrocious suffering, which further depresses those who must watch him die.

Other more subtle, but equally dangerous, forms of warfare are being waged. To create a loyal cadre of pro-Soviet Afghans to take eventual control of the government, Moscow has invaded the family to initiate reeducation and indoctrination programs. Children as young as 5 and 6 years old are being separated from their families and sent to the Soviet Union for as long as 10 years of indoctrination. Since 1979, an estimated 40,000 Afghan students have been sent to the Soviet Union; 10,000 are there at any given time. Afghan school curricula have been revised to include Marxist-Leninist ideology; revised history books written by Soviet scholars have been introduced; Afghan professors have been replaced with those from communist countries. The intent is clear: Moscow seeks to obliterate Afghan cultural values from the minds of the country's youth and to substitute a made-in-Moscow view of the world.

Refugees

Not surprisingly, Soviet tactics in Afghanistan have resulted in one of the greatest mass migrations in history.

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Nearly 3.5 million refugees—more than the population of the entire Washington, D.C., metropolitan area and about 20%-25% of Afghanistan's prewar population—have fled the country. At least a million more have been driven from the countryside into internal exile in cities and towns where a Red Army-style peace has been imposed.

Before coming to Washington, I had the privilege of visiting on several occasions as president of the International Rescue Committee many of the refugee camps in the North West Frontier border area of Pakistan. I have spoken with hundreds of refugees and have been received in their simple tents and mud huts. I have seen at firsthand their fierce determination. I have felt their hatred of the Soviet invaders, their love of freedom, and their longing to return once again to their land and to their homes.

Afghan refugees rely primarily on the Government of Pakistan, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and private voluntary agencies for their basic needs. The United States has contributed generously to the Afghan relief effort. Since 1980, we have provided over $430 million, primarily through the UNHCR and the World Food Program. The Afghan relief effort is one of the most effective refugee programs in the world; it is certainly the largest. But dependence on others' hospitality and charity is alien to a people renowned for their industriousness, their creativity, and their proud independence. Their only request to their visitors is like Winston Churchill's in World War II: "Give us the tools and we will finish the job."

I, too, am convinced that, one day, they will return to a free Afghanistan. Throughout Afghanistan's long, tumultuous history of resisting marauding armies and ruthless invaders, no one—not Alexander or Genghis Khan, not Tamerlane or Nadir Shah—has been able to conquer and rule the Afghans. The Afghan *mujahidin* say they will fight to the last man, and I believe them. The Soviets must acknowledge and accept that the will of a people united in a national liberation struggle cannot be broken by force of arms, short of genocide.

The Military Situation

What the Soviet Union faces in Afghanistan is not the opposition they surmounted in Central Asia in the 1920s; nor is it a band of rag-tag rebels fighting without a clear purpose or cause. They face freedom fighters trained to fight with modern weapons and backed by a people united in their will to expel yet another invader. Hostility and active opposition to the Karmal regime are not confined to one area; it encompasses the entire country. The Soviets have been unable to find qualified, loyal Afghan technocrats willing to participate in Karmal's puppet government. They have been forced to abandon the pretense that they are merely advising the Karmal regime and now either directly make or are deeply involved in every major political, military, or social decision. There can be no doubt that it is a Soviet-run government.

On the military front, Soviet efforts to build up the Kabul army have been thwarted by disloyalty, desertions, defections, and disillusionment. The puppet Afghan army has shrunk to less than half of its preinvasion strength of 90,000.

The Soviet army itself has been plagued by alcohol and drug abuse; lack of discipline is a major problem. From Soviet defectors, themselves tangible proof of the unpopularity of the war, we have learned that Soviet soldiers sent to Afghanistan are told that they will be fighting alongside Afghans to defeat U.S., Chinese, and Pakistani imperialists. Instead, they discover with dismay that they are expected to kill Afghans fighting to defend their families, homes, and land.

In contrast to Soviet morale, *mujahidin* morale remains high. On the battlefield, the Afghan resistance is better organized, better trained, and more effective than ever before. Despite stepped-up fighting and more aggressive Soviet tactics, the invaders have been unable to consolidate their conquest. The resistance continues to control over 75% of the countryside. Mounting Soviet losses of supply convoys, helicopters, and fixed-wing aircraft testify to the improved ability of resistance fighters to use the modern weaponry at their disposal. They have become more adept at carrying guerrilla warfare to major cities. Even in Kabul, the most heavily guarded garrisons and airbases, as well as the Soviet Embassy, have been rocketed.

Six years ago, few of us could have imagined that today we would be talking about an Afghan resistance that has kept one of the most powerful armies in the world at bay. The Afghan people's courage, resilience, and iron will to survive have kept open the only path to a lasting solution—a negotiated political settlement. The *mujahidin* cannot hope to expel the Soviet invader by force. Sheer numbers are on the Soviet side. The military option entails only further death and destruction. It will neither achieve a Soviet victory nor crush the will of the Afghan people to be free.

The only lasting solution to the war is a negotiated political settlement that gets Soviet troops out of Afghanistan and permits the Afghan people to determine their own destiny. Only then will the *mujahidin* put down their arms; only then will the refugees voluntarily return to their country and global, as well as local, tensions decrease.

The Roles of Pakistan and the the United Nations

We admire and support Pakistan's courageous and unwavering stand on the Afghanistan issue, particularly its efforts in the United Nations and elsewhere to achieve a negotiated settlement. We believe, as do the Pakistanis, that every avenue must be explored to find a peaceful solution. We encourage other countries in the region—particularly India—to contribute toward achieving a comprehensive and viable settlement.

As you know, there is a vehicle in place to achieve a negotiated settlement. Under the auspices of the United Nations, the UN Secretary General's personal representative, Diego Cordovez, has been conducting a series of negotiations between the Government of Pakistan and the Kabul regime. The talks, conducted indirectly through the UN negotiator rather than face to face, are referred to as proximity talks. Pakistan does not recognize the puppet regime of Babrak Karmal, which was installed and is maintained solely through Soviet military force and clearly does not represent the will of the Afghans. Currently housing 2-3 million Afghan refugees who have specifically fled the excesses of the Karmal regime, Pakistan's unwillingness and inability to recognize the puppet government is not only understandable but morally justified. We support this view.

These proximity talks envisage four basic documents or instruments which would comprise a comprehensive settlement. They include agreements on

mutual noninterference and nonintervention, voluntary return of the refugees, international guarantees, and the interrelationship of these instruments to the key question of Soviet withdrawal. To date, three of the four instruments have been largely completed. The interrelationships document, in which the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan would be addressed, remains to be negotiated. This is the critical document. The issue of withdrawal lies at the heart of the Afghan problem; it is the reason the proximity talks were convened. The questions addressed in the other instruments, though important, are ancillary.

The United States has firmly supported and continues to support a negotiated withdrawal of Soviet troops. In this connection, we informed the Secretary General in writing this week of our willingness to play an appropriate guarantor's role in the context of a comprehensive and balanced settlement. We have also conveyed our readiness to accept the draft guarantees instrument that Mr. Cordovez has presented to the parties and to us, provided that the central issue of Soviet troop withdrawal and its interrelationship to the other instruments were resolved.

On December 16, a new round of UN-sponsored negotiations will begin in Geneva. Both parties apparently have agreed to maintain the proximity format. The way is thus open to tackle, once and for all, the prompt and final withdrawal of the Soviet army from Afghanistan. If, as General Secretary Gorbachev indicated in Geneva, the Soviet Union supports the UN process, and if, as the Soviet Union continues to claim, it is sincerely interested in achieving a political settlement, then this next round of talks will provide them a forum to demonstrate their sincerity. Let us hope that the Soviets have finally made the political decision to seriously negotiate a withdrawal of their troops.

But let there be no mistake. If the Soviets digress and make excuses or unreasonable demands, the blame for lack of progress will be theirs alone. Afghanistan is and will remain a thorn in the Soviets' side. Time will not heal this wound. It will grow and fester and spread. Afghanistan is an international embarrassment to them that has increased rather than faded away. It serves as a painful and bloody example of Soviet insincerity and untrustworthiness—an example that nations around the world, large and small—have taken to heart.

The courage, steadfastness, and faith of the Afghan people stand in stark contrast to the cowardice reflected in Soviet atrocities against innocent civilians. Last Friday, the United Nations endorsed a report prepared by Special Rapporteur Felix Ermacora. It concluded that the war in Afghanistan "is exacting an increasing toll in human lives and continues to engender human rights violations on a large scale."

We must speak out about these atrocities. The world must know what is happening in Afghanistan. The *mujahidin* are doing a magnificent job of resisting the Soviets. For our part, the rest of the world must exact from the Soviets a political price. They must pay for the death and destruction they are wreaking daily in Afghanistan.

President Reagan, in his meeting with Mr. Gorbachev, made it clear that, while we seek a wider dialogue on issues of global concern, we will not remain silent on Afghanistan. Afghanistan will remain an obstacle to an overall improvement in our relationship. As long as the Soviets pursue a military solution, we will continue to support the Afghan cause.

My message to you tonight is clear. Collectively, we can and must help restore Afghanistan's independence. If we speak with one voice against this brazen use of Soviet force and continue to pressure the Soviets from all sides, we can create a situation in which it will be in their best interests to withdraw. In conclusion, allow me to quote Edmund Burke's warning which, although 200 years old, sadly applies to the world today.

> When bad men combine, the good must associate; else they will fall, one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle. ■

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